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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000188

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SUBJECT: MDC UPDATE ON PROGRESS IN TALKS

REF: (A) HARARE 174 (B) HARARE 84 (C) HARARE 73 (D)
03 HARARE 2412

Classified By: Political Officer Win Dayton under Section 1.5(b)(d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: MDC Secretary-General Welshman Ncube on January 30 told the Ambassador that he expected to engage his ruling party interlocutor, Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa, soon on key issues relating to prospective talks. A new electoral law would address many issues, while the fate of The Daily News and the youth militias loomed as potential stumbling blocks. He intimated that they already had discussed the possibility of a government of national unity in hypothetical terms as a vehicle to carry the country toward presidential and parliamentary elections, possibly by 2005. Ncube said he and Chinamasa envisioned reaching tentative agreement on most important issues before the parties announced formal talks and began the task of getting the deal blessed by key constituencies. END SUMMARY.

Talks on Talks Substantive

2. (C) During a visit by the Ambassador to his law office, Ncube advised that he was scheduled to meet Chinamasa on February 3 to resume discussions on issues relating to resumption of interparty talks. He reported that Chinamasa had deflected earlier attempts during January to engage on grounds of being on official leave, notwithstanding that Chinamasa had been playing a high profile role at the parliament. Discussions would revolve in large part around a draft Electoral Amendment Act that Ncube shared with the Justice Minister two weeks before, and draft amendments to the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), which Ncube had conveyed in November.

3. (C) Ncube asserted that Chinamasa shared his desire to resolve most important contentious issues before commencing formal interparty talks. The election law would address many critical matters. He said that certain important "environmental" issues, such as the status of the youth militia and The Daily News, had yet to be addressed. The Daily News problem might resolve itself (ref A), and other well-known points of difference, such as the MDC's election petition and stand on sanctions, would "fall away" once agreement was reached on new elections.

4. (C) Ncube said Chinamasa "seemed to agree" with his proposal to conduct parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as urban and rural council elections, at roughly the same time so as to reduce the perpetual state of tension engendered by rolling elections. Timing had yet to be agreed, although the positions were narrowing: the MDC originally wanted elections this year but was now focusing more on establishing proper atmospherics and mechanics than on immediacy; Chinamasa first argued for presidential elections in 2007, but more recently had shifted to 2006. (Comment: Parliamentary elections are now scheduled for 2005 and presidential election for 2008. End comment.) Once agreement had been sealed on key issues, formalized talks would provide a process by which the parties would sell the deal to key constituencies.

5. (C) According to Ncube, the two had discussed the division of portfolios in a coalition government in a hypothetical "brainstorming" exercise. The MDC remained open to the idea of a government of national unity, depending on preconditions -- the shorter the government's duration, the better, for example. ZANU-PF was insisting that the MDC "be involved" in the government in some way, and sought to defer consideration of problematic issues such as POSA, AIPPA, and political violence until a new government was in place. Ncube asserted that transition arrangements would be addressed in a new constitution that would be ratified by the parliament, although Chinamasa sometimes seemed reluctant to take the parliamentary route of ratification. Ncube noted that certain opposition elements could be expected to criticize the parliamentary approach in any event.

16. (C) Ncube indicated that Chinamasa had been candid about the pressures he was facing within the ruling party. Chinamasa said that Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, Parliamentary Speaker Emmerson Mnangagwa, retired General Solomon Mujuru, and general-turned-politician Josiah Tungamirai were among those pressing him on talks. Chinamasa said he took instructions directly from Mugabe, who he saw regularly though not daily. He confirmed that State Minister for National Security Nicholas Goche, who did see Mugabe on a daily basis, also played a substantial role in the talks. Chinamasa had explained to Ncube that he often had to appear "radicalized" toward the opposition in order to maintain his "mainstream" ZANU-PF credentials.

17. (C) Ncube predicted that the ruling party's latest bloodletting over Chiyangwa (ref C) would not have any direct implications for prospects on talks. He observed that Mnangagwa's camp (which had included Chiyangwa) was under "intense pressure", in part because they had abused state-connected funds to finance Mnangagwa's ill-fated succession campaign. Ncube reported that as Speaker, Mnangagwa of late had been uncharacteristically hostile to him and selected other MDC MPs, and speculated that he may see them as part of the cabal arraying against him.

18. (C) Elaborating further on ruling party dynamics, Ncube commented that ZANU-PF's membership generally recognized that internal political settlement would have to precede effective international re-engagement. The membership was eager for progress but extremely anxious about talks because all but a few were out of the loop. Ncube reported that ZANU-PF MPs he encountered on a regular basis always asked him about progress in his talks with their Justice Minister, from whom they uniformly said they got no information. That the Finance Minister waited 15 minutes to query him after he emerged from a bank queue Ncube took to indicate both how tight the ZANU-PF information loop was and how little the Minister has to do at his Ministry.

Diplomatic Engagement

19. (C) Turning to the international front, Ncube said his party continued to be in close contact with the South Africans on process and had advised them about the lack of concrete progress on substantive issues. He noted that Ambassador Ndou had indicated that the sooner elections were held, the better -- 2005 was too far off. Ncube reported that the Namibian mission in Harare had become increasingly engaged with the party leadership and other diplomatic missions on the issue of talks. He said that Tanzania was much more positive privately than their public stance would indicate. During their meeting with President Mkapa in October, he informed them that he had selected his new Ambassador to Harare because of his stature as former Secretary-General of the OAU's Committee on Liberation at the

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OAU -- he was not one to be pushed around easily. Indeed, the new Tanzanian ambassador had met with MDC officials three times and seemed genuine in his stated desire to be helpful in stimulating momentum on interparty dialogue.

10. (C) Ncube emphasized MDC interest in the prospective UN elections mission to evaluate prospects for involvement in Zimbabwe's next parliamentary election (ref B), and reported that the party had been communicating with local UN representatives on the matter. He was encouraged that the office's discussions with Chinamasa had gone well and not surprised that engagement with election administrator Mudede had been negative.

Party Doing Well

11. (C) Addressing the health of his party, Ncube asserted that party planning generally was improving. The party's various committees were active developing action programs, with attention recently being devoted to party organization; voter education; and diplomatic strategies, especially with respect to Africa. The Information Department was spotlighting the party's so-called "RESTART" economic program, which had been launched officially January 29 despite a clumsy government attempt to thwart the associated public event. (The event commenced an hour late when party lawyers had to obtain an urgent court order quashing police attempts to close the meeting over lack of a permit.) In some detail, Ncube denied reports in this week's edition of the Financial Gazette that he had been involved in a secret effort in 2002 to link up with Mnangagwa and then Armed Forces Chief Zvinavashe to create a coalition to sideline both Mugabe and MDC Party President Morgan Tsvangirai.

Litigation Vexes

¶12. (C) Ncube observed that Tsvangirai's treason trial was proving to be even more politicized than expected. The prosecution was seeking gratuitous details on the party's functioning and strategies, and emphasizing things that Tsvangirai did not know in an effort to undermine his

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stature. Ncube was scheduled to testify for the defense when the trial resumes on February 11.

¶13. (C) Elsewhere on the legal front, Ncube said he understood that the report on Harare's MDC Executive Mayor Elias Mudzuri (ref D) reached negative conclusions and recommended criminal proceedings against the beleaguered politician. He implied that the process would take considerable time, noting that Local Government Minister Chombo wanted to make sure he had an "airtight" case and that Mudzuri would not be able to respond legally.

Comment

¶14. (C) MDC officials have previously confided to us cautious openness to a government of national unity but this is the first confirmation that portfolios actually have been discussed with the ruling party. Ncube and his party may view such conceptualizing as hypothetical, but it may fuel ZANU-PF expectations for a coalition and put the MDC on a slippery slope. Ncube's expectation that most important issues will be nailed down before formal talks are announced may prove elusive. Historically, ZANU-PF interlocutors often indicate tentative agreement or flexibility, only to be snapped back on a short, rigid leash.

SULLIVAN